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ABSTRACT

Rarely when single-sex Catholic secondary schools convert to coed school organization is the potential loss of gender-specific benefits addressed. Since the movement to coeducation is seldom accompanied by the return of a "converted" school to single-sex status, the incalculable loss to the traditional gender diversity of school organization is alarming, especially when research findings show strong and sustaining effects for these schools, most notably for women and minorities. While boys' schools resemble the factory model of schooling (structured, functional, economically efficient, and focused on a delivery system of education), girls' schools resemble an ecological model of schooling: one that fosters inclusiveness, interaction, caring, values, and attention to the context of education not as a delivery system, but as a way of life. Catholic education has distinct approaches toward the education of girls and boys; when these approaches are "blended" in a coed school, the distinctiveness is lost. Moreover, achievement advantages found in Catholic schools can be attributed to single-sex Catholic schools, not to Catholic schools generally. Students in single-sex schools display more positive academic interests, attitudes, and behaviors than students in coed schools. (13 references) (KM)

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SINGLE-SEX SCHOOLING AND WOMEN'S EDUCATION

by

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of Catholic high schools has been the relatively large numbers that enroll students from only one sex. Whereas single-sex schools virtually disappeared in the public sector almost a century ago, single-sex secondary schools maintained a strong position among Catholic schools through the mid 1960s commanding more than half of all student enrollments for that age range in the Catholic sector. Today single-sex schools are declining rapidly, especially girls' schools due to school closures.

According to the 1983-84 National Catholic Educational Association's (NCEA) national survey of all Catholic secondary schools, 16% said their history had included a change from single-sex to coed school reorganization -- most of them recently. Seventy percent of the changes took place since 1967 (Yeager, Benson, Guerra, Manno, 1985). Based on a figure of 1122 Catholic school responses, approximately 54% of Catholic high schools were coed in 1983-84. Based on a random sample of 208 schools selected from the NCEA membership roster, four years later 18% were for boys and 20% for girls (Brigham by way of Lee, July 1988) representing a slight decline for boys (1%) and a more substantial decrease for girls (6%).

Although the trend of the late 1960s and early 1970s for single-sex schools to "go coed" subsided considerably for a decade or so, in the mid 1980s a "second wave" of conversions to coeducation began (Goldberg, 1988). Threatened by declining enrollments and rising costs, single-sex secondary schools continue to confront economic and social challenges to the pursuit of a unique mission. Rarely when these schools close is

the potential loss of gender-specific benefits ever addressed. Since the movement to coeducation is rarely accompanied by the return of a "converted" school to single-sex status, the incalculable loss to the traditional gender diversity of school organization within American education is alarming, especially when research findings show strong and sustaining effects for these schools, especially for women and minorities (Lee and Marks, 1989).

What Do We Know about Contemporary Single-sex Catholic High Schools?: A Brief Description

Catholic single-sex schools possess organizational characteristics and in important other ways can be described as different from coed schools. In The Catholic High School: A National Portrait (Yeager, et. al., 1985) various descriptive statistics are given about single-sex schools including:

1. The majority of single-sex schools are private (primarily religious-order sponsored); 68% are boys' and 74% are girls' schools.
2. Boys' schools are larger than girls' schools; whereas nearly half of all boys' schools enroll over 750 students, only 14% of girls' schools fall in this category. In comparison to both boys' schools and coed schools, girls' schools are disproportionally small -- 66% enroll fewer than 500 students compared to 54% of coed and 34% of boys' schools for this category.
3. Interestingly, single-sex schools enroll a higher proportion of minority students than do coed schools with girls' schools taking the lead: 55% of girls' schools

enroll over 11% minority students compared to 51% for boys' and 47% for coed schools.

Several other interesting statistics differentiating single-sex and coed schools are given by Bryk, Holland, Lee, and Carriedo (1984). Based on the High School and Beyond (HSB) national data set: boys' schools serve a higher socioeconomic group, charge higher tuitions, have larger class sizes, and pay higher teacher salaries compared to girls' schools followed by coed schools. Also, boys' schools have a higher proportion of their students in an academic program and a higher proportion of teachers with advanced degrees than the two other school types (i.e., girls' and coed). Boys' and girls' schools deploy resources in a different manner.

As Tony Bryk and his colleagues conclude:

> In essence, boys' schools strive for economic efficiency -- larger schools focused almost exclusively on delivering an academic program to students in relatively large groups. Girls' religious order schools pay lower salaries. They also are smaller in size and have a more favorable student-teacher ratio .... (They) resemble the private academy -- smaller schools with smaller classes and a more intimate personal environment (p. 46).

Returning to the NCEA survey of 1984, boys' schools as a group (more than other school types) take a structured, functional approach to education.

Boys' schools tend to:

-- have higher clock hour requirements for graduation,

-- place greater emphasis on structure and discipline,

-- have higher academic expectations as indicated by principal's estimates of:

+ the importance of preparing students for college as a school goal,
+ the degree to which teachers press students to do their best work,
+ the degree to which students are expected to do homework, and

-- have more teachers who belong to a bargaining unit.

Girls' schools, on the other hand, resemble more a community and reflect both catholic and Catholic values (with a small "c" and a large "C").

Girls' schools tend to:

-- have a larger percentage of nonCatholic as well as minority students;
-- have a larger percentage of teachers who are women religious;
-- are more likely to make tenure available to teachers;
-- include more teachers in different administrative areas than do other schools;
-- place greater emphasis on the social teachings of the Church and make serious attempts to attract disadvantaged students;
-- demonstrate a more caring atmosphere in that
+ teachers take time to respond to students'needs, and
+ principals perceive the school as creating a caring and benevolent environment;
-- express global concerns such as stewardship and compassion for others; and
-- emphasize the centrality of religion in the life of

the school by

+ giving budget priority to religious celebrations and retreats,
+ demonstrating as much concern for faith development as for academic and social development,
+ praying together and discussing spiritual concerns.
+ Teachers and administrators are more likely to view their work as ministry; and
+ the religion department has more priority in funding, scheduling, etc. than in other schools.

In sum, then, we could say that boys' schools resemble the factory model of schooling -- structured, functional, pragmatic, economically efficient and focused on a delivery system of education. In contrast, girls' schools resemble an ecological model of schooling, one that fosters inclusiveness, interaction, caring, values, community, adaptation and attention to the context of education viewing education not as a system to be delivered but as a life to be lived.

What can we say about coeducational schools? The authors of The Catholic High School: A National Portrait conclude that coed schools seem to be a blend of boys' and girls' schools in their style and approach. While they are not markedly different from either, in a few important ways they stand out from single-sex schools in that they tend to:

-- experience greater disciplinary problems and principal turnover;

-- have a higher percentage of lay teachers and nonCatholic teachers; and

-- have greater parental involvement, particularly regarding family attendance at extracurricular activities.

Basically, no differences were found among single-sex and coed schools regarding teacher and student satisfaction, motivation, enthusiasm, and sense of community. It is not clear whether the differences between boys' and girls' schools reflect a sex-biased approach to education, or if these schools are being responsive to the needs of the student body type they serve. What is clear is that Catholic education has distinct approaches toward the education of girls and boys; when these approaches are "blended" in a coed school, a certain distinctiveness about Catholic education is lost.

What Effects Do Single-Sex Schools Have?: An Overview of Research Findings

Single-sex Catholic schools offer educational experiences to students that have important advantages, especially for girls and minority students. In both the high school classes of 1972 and 1982, students in single-sex Catholic schools have consistently shown higher achievement and higher educational aspirations than their counterparts in Catholic coeducational schools. Using the 1972 National Longitudial Study (NLS) data, Riordan (1985) compared white students in public schools with Catholic single-sex and coeducational students. He found that minority students of both sexes (i.e., Blacks and Hispanics) scored better on all tests, scoring almost a year above minorities in mixed sex schools, both public and private, and that minority girls scored slightly better than minority boys. His study suggests that single-sex schools

need to be separated from coed ones in any comparisons of school achievement and that when public coed and Catholic coed schools are compared, nc differences in academic achievement are found. The implication of his work is that the achievement advantages found in Catholic schools can be attributed to single- sex Catholic schools, not to Catholic schools generally.

Valerie Lee and Tony Bryk (1986) examined a random sample of 75 Catholic high schools from the 1982 High School and Beyond (HSB) data. Controlling for student background (as Coleman and his colleagues did in High School Achievement: Public, Catholic and Private Schools Compared) and for contextual differences (such as school gender, school social composition, and curriculum track which Coleman and his colleagues did not do), they found that students in single-sex schools display more positive academic interests, attitudes, and behaviors than students in coed schools. There were no achievement areas in which coeducational school students surpasssed their single-sex-school counterparts; however the pattern of effects was different for male and female students. While boys showed somewhat diminished effects from sophomore to senior year, gains in reading and science for girls were statistically significant.

Again, effects concerning student educational aspirations, self-concept, internal locus of control, and sex role stereotyping generally favored single- sex schools, with larger effects accruing for girls' schools. Girls' schools displayed a statistically significant positive effect in senior-year locus of control and sophomore-year self concept while these estimates for boys' schools were not statistically significant. Girls' schools were

considerably less likely to evidence stereotyped sex role attitudes regarding the compatibility of work and motherhood and the traditional role of men as achievers than were comparable girls in coeducational schools. In an earlier study of single-sex and coed Catholic high schools, Bryk and his colleagues (1984) found that girls in single-sex schools are particularly strong in affirming the view that is is acceptable for women to seek careers outside the home, while boys schools strongly favored traditional views involving women and careers.

In very recent study of single-sex schools, Valerie Lee and Helen Marks at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, utilizing the HSB data set, compared 1533 college students who attended 75 Catholic high schools, 45 of which were single-sex institutions, on an array of attitudes, values, and behaviors measured two to four years after high school graduation. They document the sustaining, or long-range effects of single-sex education.

In conducting the study, Lee and Marks chose to examine outcomes which tap students' attitudes, values, aspirations and plans for education beyond the baccalaureate, orientation toward careers, and satisfaction with their college experiences. They did not choose to study achievement or student performance. Their choice of outcomes taps more general attitudes about self and society, reflecting the hypothesis that the Catholic secondary school experience is meant to instill more than academic preparation in those students who experience it. Their study also reflects the hypothesis that school gender grouping may in fact be related to the formation of goals different from coed schools and to students' attitudes toward the importance of such goals.

What did Lee and Marks learn about the long-range effects of Catholic single-sex schooling?

1. Where they attend college and their post-baccalaureate educational plans.

In comparison to students graduating from a coeducational high school, single-sex school graduates were more likely to choose highly-selective 4-year colleges and to attend colleges that are Catholic. Girls' school graduates held consistently higher aspirations concerning the post baccalaureate degrees they were planning to obtain than girls from coed schools. They were significantly more likely to consider obtaining a law degree than their coeducational counterparts. They were also more likely to have considered obtaining an advanced degree.

Boys were more likely to be in private colleges compared to their coeducational counterparts and less likely to be enrolled in community colleges than 4-year colleges. As with girls, boys' school graduates were also more likely to consider obtaining an advanced degree than their coed counterparts.

Interestingly, concerning medical or doctoral degrees, except for the differences favoring boys over girls in general, there were no differences within the gender groupings. In other words, attending a single-sex high school does not effect the likelihood of obtaining a medical or doctoral degree.

2. How college students' attitudes and values differ based on the type of high school from which they graduated.

Lee and Marks found several statistically significant long-range/sustaining effects for girls who attended all-girls' high schools, but none for students who attended all-boys' schools.

+ Young women who attended single-sex secondary schools held significantly less stereotypic attitudes about the role of women in the workplace compared to their counterparts who attended coeducational schools. This finding was related to the interest these women have in breaking down steroetypic roles for women related to professional rather than domestic settings.
+ Women who attended girls' secondary schools were also likely to be more actively involved in political affairs by the end of college. This includes such behaviors as attending political gatherings, working and campaigning for candidates, holding elected office and, to a lesser extent, engaging in political discussions with family or friends.
+ Concerning orientation toward work, young women from single-sex schools score higher on democratic and humanitarian attitudes such as wanting freedom in making decisions, favoring a congenial work environment, and desiring interesting and important work. They are less concerned, but not significantly so, about financial rewards than their coed counterparts and do not differ from them regarding the desire for job prestige and challenge.
+ Lastly, girls' school graduates are also considerably more likely to be very well satisfied with both the academic and non-academic (primarily social) aspects of their college experiences than girls graduating from coeducational institutions.

Although there were no statistically significant effects, either positive or negative, for young men who attended boys' schools, there were two substantive negative effects (effects are there, but they cannot be attributed to high school attended). First, boys' school graduates are less likely to evidence concerns for social justice than their coed counterparts and second, they show less satisfaction with the non-academic aspects of their college experience. These two findings, or lack of findings, is quite curious.

Since social justice is an explicit element of the Catholic high school curriculum (Bryk, et al, 1984), it is curious that among Catholic high school graduates, graduates of boys' high schools display this effect negatively whereas graduates of all other types of Catholic high schools do not.

In regard to the finding that graduates from boys' high schools are less satisfied with the social aspects of their college experience, while this could be a reflection of the college they attend, it may also reflect such students' discomfort in a social environment that is overwhelmingly coeducational. It should be noted that one of the frequently cited arguments against single-sex schools is the fear that such schools will hinder the development of social skills. In view of this argument, it is curious that a negative effect on college social experience should be found for boys' schools, but a strong positive effect for girls' schools. The question could be raised: If one-sex education supposedly retards adolescent social development, why would this apply only to boys?

In sum, it is clear that something of value is happening in single-sex secondary schools, especially girls' schools, that is not occurring in coed schools, particularly the formation of positive attitudes and values. Although the variables tested do not include an extensive list, it is rather amazing that two to four years after high school graduation, and considering the impact of college and other experiences, and remembering the rapid physical, emotional and intellectual development of the late adolescent years, that any effects could be found related to type of high school attended. Such a result is truly remarkable in the research enterprise (Lee and Marks, 1989).

What we Don't Know About Single-sex Catholic High Schools

There are a number of things we do not know about single-sex schools because of the research designs used. Parenthetically, it is important to note that some new research being done in Australia supports the transition to coeducational institutions for both boys and girls of high school age claiming that self-concept and achievement are not effected (Marsh, Smith, Marsh, and Owens, 1988). In this latter study, students were monitored at the 10th grade level over a four-year period which seems to be an insufficient time to make such a determination. Lee is currently preparing a critique of this research.

In the Lee and Marks study on the sustaining effects of single-sex schools, the research design included only graduates who attended college. Although few, we don't know about the effects of these schools on noncollege attenders. Do they hold similar attitudes and values as the college attenders? Does attending college reinforce secondary school values, especially for

women, or are they eventually weakened by the demands of the workplace and other economic and social realities?

We also don't know what the differential effects are for students who attend school with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. It would be interesting to determine if girls who graduate from high tuition (e.g., elite) high schools differ from low tuition high schools (e.g., nonelite). Are Catholic girls' schools more empowering for the upwardly mobile, for students who come from lower and middle class families than for those whose families are already empowered economically and socially? In other words, for example, to some extent upper middle class girls could be expected to hold less traditional views of women and their role in the workplace despite type of high school attended, whereas this is less likely the case for lower class students.

Nevertheless, the particular domains in which single-sex girls' school effects have been found are especially interesting and merit further discussion. In so doing, I would like to condense these findings into two domains or themes in order to seek an "explanation" for them in the socio-historical context of Catholic women's education in this country and the role played by women religious. The two themes which I see emerging from these findings are as follows:

1. **Women's sense of energy or empowerment** that results from the single-sex school experience and manifests itself in higher educational aspirations, the pursuit of traditionally male careers such as law, and women's concerns for gender equity in the workplace, especially

in regard to participating in decision making.

2. Secondly, and related to the first theme, women's sense of pluralism, or universalism, that is, their concern for social justice, their desire for law careers, and their higher political activism that results from the single-sex school experience.

I would argue that Catholic girls' schools have a unique educational mission and purpose that is a part of the educational history of women, especially Catholic women in this country, and that this mission is intimately related to the traditions, values, and experiences (i.e., community memory, if you will) of American religious women. Scholarly neglect of the education of Catholic girls in the 19th century has left untold a significant part of the American Catholic story. Likewise, recognition of religious women in the educational story of women is not in proportion to the contributions they have made. Hidden within this story, I believe, are the roots of understanding the impact of Catholic girls' schools on women, as well as their impact on the development of the Church in the United States, and on American society.

There is an emerging new body of literature on the history of religious women in The United States. In support of my argument that girls' schools have a unique mission and purpose tied to the history of women's education and the development of women's religious communities in the United States, I will be drawing on material taken from the following sources:

Eileen Mary Brewer's Nuns and the Education of American Catholic Women: 1860-1920. Brewer provides an account of four midwestern religious communities who founded convent schools in the midwest.

Barbara Misners' 'Highly Respectable and Accomplished

Ladies': Catholic Women Religious in America: 1790-1850. Misner recounts the founding and development of the first eight American women's religious communities in the United States, all founded between 1790 and 1829 in southern Maryland, Kentucky, and South Carolina. Six of the eight communities had a solid core of members who were descended from the old Maryland Catholic aristocratic families.

Mary Ewens' "Women in the Convent" in a book edited by Karen Kennelly, American Catholic Women: A Historical Exploration. Ewens' work including her dissertation "The Role of the Nun in Nineteenth-Century America" (1971) provides a valuable overview based largely on published sources about all women religious in nineteenth century America. Her book chapter, cited here, is concerned primarily with the external relations of women religious with the commercial enterprise, especially with their ability to finance schools and support themselves; and their dealings with church authority, especially with bishops who did not always support their work.

The educational basis for women's empowerment and the development in them of pluralistic attitudes can be seen, I believe, in this brief retelling of the story of women's education and the role of women's religious communities.

Prior to 1790, there were few schools or academies for young women any place in the United States. Studies for the education of women in the early 19th century show a bleak picture indeed. Even in New England where formal education had been provided almost from the foundation of the colonies there were, reportedly, women from respectable families in Boston who were illiterate at the time of

the American Revolution (Misner, p. 179). In the south, elementary education was usually dependent on the family's ability to hire a tutor. Until the early 20th century, convent academies provided the only available secondary education for many young women, Catholic as well as nonCatholic (Brewer, p. xviii). Young men attended academies or prep schools to prepare for college entrance which was not an expectation for women whose place was in the home. Only well after 1900 when secondary schooling became a part of the public school system in this country could girls more readily obtain a secondary education and the proportion of nonCatholic girls in convent academies began to decline (Brewer, p. xviii).

In a spirit of pluralism, but also out of economic necessity, all the early Catholic schools welcomed nonCatholics (Misner, p.189). Early Catholic almanacs, directories and newspapers printed the advertisements for the various academies, all of which made some statement about the acceptance of nonCatholics. Frequently these statements made the point that the Sisters were opposed to proselytizing (Misner, p. 177). In rural areas and on the frontier, before the mid 19th century, even private schools for the affluent were often lacking. Catholic schools, whether academies, pay schools without boarders, or free schools met the need for basic education for the young, whether Catholic or not (Misner, pp. 177-8). Some Bishops were opposed to the Sisters teaching nonCatholics, and to conducting academies rather than devoting themselves exclusively to teaching the poor especially in large cities where there was a great need for Sisters to conduct orphanages (Misner, pp. 189-90).

The 19th century saw tremendous growth and development in

American religious life for women. The number of Sisters in the United States increased from fewer than 500 in 12 communities in 1830 to nearly 45,000 by 1900. One hundred six new communities were established, 23 of them by Americans, eight from Canada, and 75 from European foundations (Ewens in Kennelly, p. 25; Brewer, p. 14).

While Sisters nursed and did social work, education was the great need in the American Church's struggle to organize and institutionalize itself. The growth of Catholic girls' academies was nothing short of phenomenal: from 47 schools in 1840 to 709 by 1910 (Brewer, p. 15).

Sisters were unique among women in the 19th century. They had a sense of empowerment and participation in the American economy and political life. In the early 19th century an unmarried woman such as the Sisters were, was an exception. Women were looked upon by men in both the Church and the State as weak and ill-prepared to make important decisions. Women in the colonial period had an important role in the total community, but as men moved out of the home in pursuit of business, women were relegated to an exalted position in the home but denied many legal rights (Misner, p. 287). In contrast, women religious were establishing their own communities and making decisions that effected their lives and the educational lives of women. That the convent was a perfect place for Catholic women to develop and use all their talents and abilities is evident in the lives of individual Sisters such as St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, Mother Theodore Guerin, Mother Cornelia Connelly, Mother Katherine Drexel, St. Frances Xavier Cabrini and a host of other remarkable women whose names we know, and thousands

more whose identities can be discovered only upon a closer scrutiny of archival resources (Ewens in Kennelly, p. 27).

Before 1850, professionalism and education for women was an exception. Even the teacher training institutions that were being founded at the time in the public sector did not expect women who attended them to devote their lives to teaching. The Sisters again were exceptions; they generally were well-prepared -- instructed by their more educated members or priests from local colleges or seminaries. They established teacher-training programs prior to those in the public sector (Misner, p. 207). Most Sisters were teachers who served in the classrooms well into their declining years, often necessitated by the demands of a growing Catholic school population.

In keeping with the times, however, religious women were quite dependent on the approval of bishops and priests. The question of the authority of the local bishop versus that of the community was, perhaps, the single most important factor in the difficulties that arose for religious women. Many a Sister had to make a wrenching personal decision when disagreements arose over the direction of a religious community's ministry (e.g., whether to teach boys as well as girls, whether to change from teaching to conducting orphanages, whether to move from one location to another, whether to give up teaching academies in favor of establishing schools for the poor). As a result of these conflicts between local bishops and religious superiors, numerous new communities developed from their original foundations. Similar conflicts occurred with priest-directors concerning the sisters' life style and convent observances (Ewens in Kennelly, p. 23).

However, when it came to the responsibility for their own finances and the day-to-day management of their institutions, the Sisters had greater autonomy and gave evidence of their wisdom and ability in this regard. In contrast to Europe, women religious in the United States have nearly always been responsible for their own support since very few institutions have ever been supported by the government, through endowments, or by a local bishop. Several communities whose rules stipulated that they would work only for the poor had to change their rules in order to survive economically. It was in this regard that the Sisters found it almost indispensible to maintain academies as they depended on the income to support themselves and their charitable works. They also ran farms, spun cloth, did sewing for themselves and others, bound books, and found many ingenious ways to obtain income (Ewens). They were astute business women and capable managers at a time when most women in society played a domestic role (Misner, p. 255).

Accounts of the earliest communities of religious women include their social justice concerns. Almost immediately upon establishing a girls' academy, the Sisters opened a school for nonpaying students, such as Elizabeth Seton did. Although they desired to do so, problems of communication and support for the Sisters prevented many of the early communities from working with the Indians. Later when they were financially able to undertake such work, they did (Misner, p. 206). Mother Katherine Drexel's family fortune, of course, supported her community's work for blacks and Indians up to the present day. Many other communities tried to provide for blacks, slave or free, but often local pressures forced these schools to close (Misner, p. 203).

The Sisters at times were victims of injustice and discrimination. They faced many hardships in adjusting to American society. During the early period when the first American communities were being founded, several other groups of women religious from Europe attempted to establish convents and schools but failed to make permanent establishments due to the conditions of the new nation which required adjustments in life-style and a change in the concept of the role and needs of religious women coming from Europe (Misner, pp. vi, vii, and 15; also, see Ewens), particularly the need for them to support themselves and to adapt to a pluralistic society. Only later when large immigrant populations provided a different set of conditions were such communities able to flourish.

Pluralistic adapation was related to the Protestant roots of American history. Strong anti-Catholic sentiments flared in the 1830's fueled by growing nationalism. Best-selling books purporting to explore the immoralities of convent living, the rise of the Know-Nothing Party, the burning of the Ursuline Convent in Massachusetts in 1834, and the passing of nunnery inspection laws subjecting convents to surprise visits from legislators who searched for evidence of unAmerican practices (Ewens, p. 25) forced nuns to don secular clothes in public in order to avoid being insulted and spat upon in the streets. The growing consciousness of nativism was in nearly all religious communities. The Sisters responded by objecting to influences on the community brought from Europe and by thinking of themselves as Americans whether they were born in the United States or not (Misner, pp. 55ff).

The ability of the Sisters to adapt and to meet the needs of a

pluralistic society; to adjust to a hostile anti-Catholic environment; to competently manage, educate and support themselves; to overcome adversity and harsh physical conditions through ingenuity and by dint of hard work; to work effectively with nonCatholics, the poor and minorities; and to conduct their other charitable works in orphanages, hospitals and on the battle fields won them the respect of Catholics and nonCatholics alike (Ewens, p. 28). They were energized, empowered, and able to flourish. They were open to a pluralistic society and moved competently in it; they showed concern about social injustices and acted to alleviate them. Their traditions, values and experiences became a part of the unique mission of Catholic girls' schools as evidenced in the leadership roles of their graduates and the recent research findings on the effects of girls' high schools.

The schools of these "highly respectable and accomplished ladies" prepared not only the future Catholic wife, mother and devoted homemaker, but also the future nun and the first professional teachers, social workers and other women leaders -- social activists, politicians, labor leaders, reformers, writers and college professors (see Kennelly). In 1983, half the women in the United States Congress, one of the two women in President Reagan's cabinet, and a host of state and local officials were graduates of Catholic girls' schools (Hennessy, 1983). Much could also be documented on the leadership role of women religious in the women's movement following the Second Vatican Council.

The effects of girls' schools documented by recent research are similar to the effects catalogued by Astin (1977) for single-sex women's colleges in the 1970's (i.e., greater academic

achievement, satisfaction with college, and aspirations for advanced graduate degress and leadership positions).

It is troubling that just at a time when Catholic schools are struggling with an identity crisis and policy decisions are leading to fewer and fewer of these schools that we now have the research which documents strong and sustaining effects for these schools. It may be coming too late. In two decades, the choice of a single-sex school may not be available despite research which demonstrates its benefits. More generally, it is a sad commentary on the use of empirical research in guiding policy decisions.

On a more hopeful note, the new research on the effects of girls' schools and the concerns of women for the improved education of women, particularly minority women, can support a revitalizatiion of single-sex schools. It is evident that girls' schools, more than any other type of Catholic education, come closest in their traditions and mission in pointing the way to a preferred future for Catholic education: an emphasis on Gospel values, respect for all cultures in a pluralistic setting, and the elimination of sexism and racism in the Church and society.

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